



consumer news

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, EDUCATION & WELFARE

Office of Consumer Affairs
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Vol. 3, No. 24, March 15, 1974

FTC report on funeral homes

Federal Trade Commission's (FTC) staff report last month on funeral homes in Washington, DC, showed that prices vary greatly from one funeral home to another. Depending on the home used, the consumer buying the least expensive funeral may pay anywhere from \$210 to \$900. The average buyer of the average funeral pays anywhere from \$550 to \$1830, so, as the survey showed, there is no such thing as an "average priced" funeral. It all depends on which home is used & the extent of services used. FTC staff did come up with a cost of \$1,137 for the "average" price for a "complete" funeral service in Washington, but research showed that a "complete" funeral did not include cemetery expenses, burial vaults or many other expenses that are part of the cost of a "total & complete" funeral. Addition of the extra charges to the "complete" funeral price resulted in a "total & complete" "average" funeral cost of \$1,886.

Although the FTC staff report was limited to 56 funeral homes in Washington, the report does provide information that can be useful to consumers nationwide. For example, the following findings of the Washington survey can be used as the basis for questions to funeral directors anywhere:

- Various priced funerals differ only in the casket used, not services provided.
- Same type of casket is used for the least expensive funeral by most funeral homes although prices vary; same general services are provided by most funeral homes for a "complete" funeral although prices vary.
- Funeral buyers may have difficulty learning the prices of the least expensive funeral available.
- Some funeral homes will provide lower priced funerals if the funeral buyer requests that some services be omitted from the "complete" funeral, such as embalming, & use of chapel or repos- ing room (where friends & family may view body).
- Funeral buyers can avoid unnecessary expenses by asking a funeral director or local govern- ment officials what services are not required by law or regulation. (In Washington & most states there is no law requiring embalming, a casket for cremation or a vault in ordinary circumstances.)

The FTC staff said there are considerations other than price in selecting a funeral home & in deciding on type of funeral service. A consumer may prefer a certain funeral home on the basis of reputation, personal acquaintance with the mortician, prior service, location, physical facilities & religious or ethnic reasons. FTC staff admitted these nonprice considerations can be important to the funeral buyer. The report, however, was intended to aid consumers in buying funeral services on the basis of price & value comparisons & to inform them:

- That there is a variety of choices available for funeral services;
- That information on prices is available but must be sought aggressively by consumers;
- That funeral prices vary substantially;
- That inexpensive funerals can be obtained by comparison shopping.

FTC has not decided whether similar funeral price studies will be made in other cities, but the staff will consider ways to improve price competition in the funeral industry & will investigate fun- eral practices—such as casket for cremation & lack of set prices—that the staff believes may be un- fair or deceptive to consumers.

For a free copy of the *FTC Survey of Funeral Prices in the District of Columbia: Staff Find- ings & Analysis*, send your request to Legal & Public Records Division, Federal Trade Commis- sion, Washington, DC 20580. Also see CONSUMER NEWS: Sept. 15, 1972, for articles on pre-arrange- ment of funerals & Federal benefits for survivors; see CONSUMER NEWS: Nov. 1, 1973, for article on questions to ask in planning a funeral.

Votes on vegetables

Sweet potatoes are considered too high in calories, eggplant is difficult to prepare & asparagus & cauliflower are too expensive. These are a few of the negative feelings consumers expressed about vegetables in an Agriculture Dept. survey. Altogether there were 14 unpopular vegetables that 2,600 homemakers seldom or never use. The survey covered 26 vegetables in all. Other low-ranking vegetables were beets, black-eyed peas, broccoli, brussels sprouts, lima beans, okra, radishes, spinach, squash & turnips. Main reason given for their unpopularity was that families dislike the way they taste.

Top favorites, according to the survey, were tomatoes, lettuce, white potatoes & white onions. Next came green beans, corn & green peas. Runners-up were celery, cucumbers, carrots, cabbage & green peppers. In addition to being considered tasty, the 12 favorites won votes because they could be prepared easily & in a variety of ways.

How would your own family rate those 26 vegetables? You might make some "ugh" vegetables more popular—and increase the variety & economy of your meals—by trying new tricks with them. You will find recipes, as well as tips on buying vegetables, in these Agriculture Dept. booklets: *Vegetables in Family Meals* (20¢), *Home Canning of Fruits & Vegetables* (20¢), *Home Freezing of Fruits & Vegetables* (20¢). All are available from Consumer Information, Pueblo, CO 81009.

Yard goods

When you buy yard goods, you are supposed to get 3 things: the material itself, the receipt for your money & a care label. The care label gives you instructions for washing, bleaching, ironing or dry cleaning the material—just like the care labels in clothes you buy. If you do not get a care label with each yard goods purchase, ask for it. Also, be sure the label you get matches the information on the label of the bolt (Usually the bolt's label will indicate, for example, "Care Label 2," meaning the clerk should give you the label marked "2.") If a care label is not available, complain to the store manager. If you do not receive a positive response, complain to Federal Trade Commission (FTC), which regulates care labeling. Write to Care Labels, Federal Trade Commission, Washington, DC 20580, or call 202-963-3735.

Price per half gallon

National Bureau of Standards (NBS) has an explanation to consumers who may see some gasoline pumps with a sign: "Price Per Half Gallon." NBS says some service stations have pumps whose price dials cannot be set above 49.9¢. Since gas now usually sells for more than 49.9¢ per gallon, station operators are setting the price dials on these old pumps (usually made before 1960) to show the price per half gallon.

More on gasoline storage

Storing gasoline in metal cans is dangerous because it creates the risks of fires, explosions & poisonings. Consumers have been warned to use strict precautions if they must store gas [CONSUMER NEWS: Jan. 15; Dec. 15, 1973].

Storing gas in plastic containers ("jerry cans") is even more risky. Because of this, National Bureau of Standards (NBS) has asked plastics producers & distributors, fire code officials & consumer groups to comment on NBS' proposed safety standard for plastic jerry cans. The standard would be voluntary—not mandatory—but, if approved, it will give industry, government officials & consumers accurate guidelines for safer storage of gas in plastic containers.

Oops

"Timetable for speaking up about trains" in the March 1 issue of CONSUMER NEWS was misleading. A Transportation Dept. report did not recommend a 25% cut in train routes & service in the northeast & midwest. Instead, the report—*Rail Service in the Midwest & Northeast Region*—identified 25% of the existing freight train routes as potentially excess lines & identified a possible 4% reduction of rail freight traffic service in the region. The 70% Federal funding would be a subsidy in cooperation with a state's plan to continue rail services that are not included in the final rail plan for the northeast & midwest. Passenger trains, including commuter trains, would not be materially affected by the 25% reduction of freight routes although Amtrak (National Railroad Passenger Corp.) might change routes on its own.

Warnings!

CLOTHES DRYERS—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warns consumers that gas & electric clothes dryers made by 6 companies may have potentially defective timers that can cause fatal electric shock. Lux Time Co. of Connecticut made the timers after Nov. 8, 1973, for the following:

Brand Name	Model #	Serial #	Brand Name	Model #	Serial #
Admiral	LDE 1833	3058824—3067520	Hamilton	DS 253W	33057 & 33107
	LDG 1833	3061381—3068230		DP 253W	32710—32884
	LDE 1835	3067699—3067760		DS 153W	32912—33319
		3065180	Kelvinator	DE640GA	042210 & 042292
Bradford	78-196	42119—43469		DE522GW	037466—041533
	78-303	40221—42711		DE522GC	037198—040199
	78-204	41325—43669		DE522GH	037696—041287
	78-212	38839—43368		DE522GA	036604—040842
	78-287	42318—42416	Kelvinator (Puerto Rico sales)	DE522G-W	038421—038490
Coronado	45-1203	12328—12427		DE522G-H	039073—039107
	45-1223	12228—12319		DE522G-A	036584—036603
				DE522G-C	037240—040194

Model & serial number may be found by opening the dryer door & looking at the upper left corner of the door well. Owners of these hazardous dryers should immediately unplug them, being careful not to touch any metal surfaces. Owners should contact the dealer for inspection & replacement of defective timer at no cost.

PET BIRDS—Agriculture Dept. warns consumers to be sure they buy only pet or exotic birds that have been raised in the U.S. or have been imported through Agriculture-approved quarantine facilities. Birds not raised in the U.S. but smuggled into this country without quarantine could carry exotic Newcastle disease or psittacosis (parrot fever). Exotic Newcastle is a foreign virus disease that is harmless to humans but is fatal to poultry & other birds—thus a threat to the nation's poultry supply. Parrot fever is a respiratory disease carried by parrots, parakeets & similar birds that humans can get.

POWERED BOATS—U.S. Coast Guard alerts owners of gas powered boats with self-contained soft-soldered fuel tanks that such boats may have fuel tank leaks. Fuel that leaks into the bilges may catch fire, or its fumes may explode. The boat owner or a competent repairman should immediately investigate the tanks thoroughly & inspect them many times during the year. Check to be sure that tanks are properly secured & that tank surfaces are not in the way of or under poorly supported decks whose flexing may crush or break the tanks. Sheet metal fuel tanks often leak at soft-soldered seams, at ends & around soft solder buttons over baffle attachment screws.

CARPETS—Consumer Product Safety Commission (CPSC) warns consumers that certain carpets from 3 companies do not meet the safety requirements of the amended Flammable Fabrics Act. CPSC has provisionally accepted consent orders from the companies, stopping the sale of the potentially dangerous carpet styles.

- Aladdin Mills Inc. (also known as Town House Rug Mills), Dalton, GA, is prohibited from selling products that do not meet the law's standards. In December, CPSC found the following unacceptable: (1) 100% polyester shag tile, style #357, "Southern Pines," sold as 9-inch squares in boxes of 12 squares; boxes are marked "Kwik-Stik Do-It-Yourself Shag Carpet in-a-box" & are numbered RN16401; made in at least 8 colors after April 16, 1971; (2) 100% polyester shag carpet sold by the roll in Sky Blue color; "Thousand Nights (AC-3)" style; made after April 16, 1971.

- Charter Carpet Corp., Dalton, GA, is prohibited from selling products that do not meet the law's standards. CPSC found the following unacceptable: 100% nylon pile with jute backing in 12-foot-wide rolls. Carpet is shag type & comes in different colors. Style is called "Ranchero 2009."

- James Carpets Inc., Dalton, GA, is prohibited from selling products that do not meet the law's standards. CPSC found the following unacceptable: (1) "Persuasion" & "Protocol" styles of 100% polyester pile in 12-foot-wide rolls of different colors; (2) "Apache" style of polypropylene olefin pile in 12-foot-wide rolls of different colors. Foam backed "Apache" did not meet a flammability standard, & neither did 552 yards of jute backed "Apache," including roll #A14227-3, which was made on July 6, 1971.

Consumers who have carpeting from any of the 3 companies in the styles described above may get additional information & advise by calling CPSC free of charge: 800-638-2666 (Maryland residents should dial 800-492-2937).

CN Notebook

Saving suggestions continue to arrive from CONSUMER NEWS readers. Many are hints for saving energy, but some are reminders of tried & true ways to save money & time. Share your tips for thrift by sending them to CN NOTEBOOK, CONSUMER NEWS, Office of Consumer Affairs, Washington, DC 20201. Please include your name & address, so we can give you credit.

Ralph Green of Newark, NJ, sends a postcard with 2 suggestions for cities to use to save gasoline for drivers: "1. Make sure streets with many traffic lights have them coordinated to minimize waiting for red lights to turn green. 2. Disallow left-hand turns on busy streets during rush hours [waiting to turn wastes energy, meaning you get zero miles per gallon]."

Mrs. John W. Sarnelli of Levittown, NY, sent a long list of tips—here are 2: "When taking groceries or packages from car to house, take all packages to house door before opening it; then take all packages in at one time. When cooking, take all ingredients needed out of the refrigerator at one time. For goodness sake, don't stand in front of the open refrigerator pondering."

Norma Saferstein of Kansas City, MO, has an imaginative way for keeping warm with less energy: "An electric blanket over a person loses much heat to the air; lying on top of the electric blanket with an ordinary blanket over you preserves more heat."

Mrs. Irene Wiley of Independence, MO, says: "Buy green gravel or AstroTurf for your front lawn, have your backyard plowed & plant a garden. Result—no gasoline driven lawnmower needed. Garden work will keep all busy, keep most at home, feed the family & provide plenty of exercise."

"My energy suggestion for the future," writes Earl Harvey of Salt Lake City, UT, "is to have the auto makers reduce the horsepower. Nobody needs 350 to 450 horsepower in any car, & they don't need 4-barrel carburetors either."

From Lakewood, CA, comes this by Morris Berger: "In large buildings having 3 or more elevators, I am suggesting that a minimum of one elevator be taken out of service to save electrical energy."

Attention Consumer News savers

Typographical errors made the numbering sequence wrong for both January issues of CONSUMER NEWS & CONSUMER REGISTER. The correct issue numbers are as follows:

Jan. 1, 1974: Vol. 3, No. 19

Jan. 15, 1974: Vol. 3, No. 20

CONSUMER NEWS is published the 1st & 15th of each month by the Office of Consumer Affairs, Health, Education & Welfare Dept., to report Federal Government programs for consumers. Use of funds for printing this publication approved by the Director of the Office of Management & Budget, June 27, 1973. Authorization to reproduce any or all items is granted. Editorial address is CONSUMER NEWS, Office of Consumer Affairs, Washington, DC 20201 (telephone: 202-245-6877); Ed Riner, Editor. For sale by the Superintendent of Documents, U.S. Government Printing Office, Washington, DC 20402; subscription \$4 a year, payable to "Supt. of Documents." Send change of address to Superintendent of Documents.

★ U.S. GOVERNMENT PRINTING OFFICE: 1974-546-256/18

DHEW PUBLICATION NO. (OS) 74-108

DEPARTMENT OF
HEALTH, EDUCATION AND WELFARE
OFFICE OF CONSUMER AFFAIRS
WASHINGTON, D.C. 20201

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PENALTY FOR PRIVATE USE, \$300

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Consumer News: March 15



